

[Michelle Harven:](#) Welcome to Force for Hire. I'm Michelle Harven.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I'm Desmon Farris. Come with us as we take a deep dive into private military contracting, and how it's transforming the battlefield.

[Interviewer:](#) We're just asking people what they think about private military contracting, just trying to get a general feel for what the population thinks.

[Interviewee 1:](#) Been on both sides of it, and I think it's terribly useful. Like anything else, it needs to be sensible, but our military can't do everything.

[Interviewer:](#) We're just asking people what their general thoughts are on private military contractors.

[Interviewee 2:](#) I don't know enough to have an opinion. I'm sorry.

[Interviewee 3:](#) My feeling on private military contractor, there's such a variety of them that they play an important role of being able to allow the Department of Defense to accomplish all their goals.

[Interviewee 4:](#) My feelings now are positive because our men need work and, usually, very well trained coming out of the service and they have restraint that the average citizen doesn't have. I think it's a positive.

[Interviewee 5:](#) I don't really like them. That's it.

[Michelle Harven:](#) For people in the military, how contracting works may not be fully understood. Even for contractors, the full scale of it may still not be clear.

[Desmon Farris:](#) This is also an industry that's constantly evolving. So it may be time to take stock again and try to answer some fundamental questions.

[Michelle Harven:](#) The reason we're focusing on private military contracting because, although hiring an army has been around since the beginning of war and contracting, as we know it, has been around for decades, there's still so much mystery and misconception.

[Desmon Farris:](#) How about a couple stats right now that puts this growing trend into perspective? In World War I, contracted personnel to military personnel was a ratio of one contractor to every 24 service members. In Vietnam, that ratio went from one to five. First Gulf War, that went from one to every 100 military personnel. But post 911 Second Gulf War, it went to a staggering one to one.

[Michelle Harven:](#) In the Middle East post 911, more US contractors have died than US military service members, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. In just Afghanistan, contractors outnumber US military by a ratio of three to one, and

have continuously outnumbered US troops since 2011, according to the Congressional Research Service.

[Desmon Farris:](#) If you want to talk money, according to the Federal Procurement Data System, nearly half of the Pentagon's budget goes to private contracting. We also have a whole episode on the money aspect of this industry coming up.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Because this topic is so vast, in each episode, we're going to dive into one piece of contracting. This will be a topical exploration, and we'll bring in experts to talk with us about it.

[Desmon Farris:](#) In between each of these more informational episodes, we're going to turn the mic over to a person whose life has been impacted by contracting, and let them tell their story and experiences to you. But first, who are we? I'm Desmon Farris.

[Michelle Harven:](#) I'm Michelle Harven.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I'm a retired veteran, United States Air Force, former military K9 handler turned audio guru.

[Michelle Harven:](#) I'm a journalist and podcast producer with a background in public media.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Thanks to Stars and Stripes for making this podcast possible. If you aren't familiar with the publication, it's the independent media arm for the Department of Defense. Stripes started as a newspaper in wartime for military affairs and its community.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Now, it's a multimedia operation with multiple additions and printing locations reaching US military bases all over the world.

[Desmon Farris:](#) And it's our inaugural podcast.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Yey.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I know. I'm super excited.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Me too.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I'm so excited. You know why I'm excited?

[Michelle Harven:](#) Why's that?

[Desmon Farris:](#) Because my story about Stars and Stripes, me, as a young airman in the Air Force, gets sent overseas to Italy for my first duty station, it's kind of hard to stay connected. This is pre-Twitter, pre-Facebook. This is the more Myspace time, and Myspace was even the head of that so.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Wow. Really?

[Desmon Farris:](#) Yeah.

[Michelle Harven:](#) What did you use?

[Desmon Farris:](#) I used Yahoo instant messenger. I kept in contact with news via Yahoo.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Was this after AIM though?

[Desmon Farris:](#) It was around this time. It was like this time, 2003, you know. The way I stay connected was login Yahoo, and Yahoo would have news stories. Once I started going out to work, I come across a newspaper. I would pick this newspaper up every day, even on my days off because it had everything from entertainment to what's going on in local community. Not only did I do that when I was at home on my duty station, I also had it when I went and was deployed, still connected to home in a way. I really liked that. That was one really great thing I loved about Stars and Stripes. Then I get to do this this now, so I'm very hyped about doing this podcast.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Everyone that I talked to about Stars and Stripes, it's amazing how anyone that you talked to who was in the military knows it so well. It's so prevalent in service members' lives.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Very much, especially in mine, overseas, missing home, and it's just a way to stay connected.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Let's talk about our goals for the podcast. Desmon, what are your goals?

[Desmon Farris:](#) I want to take this subject, and I want to get the information about it, get it out to those serving, those who are thinking about going into this career field, and basically give them something that they can use to maybe direct their choices and make informed choices about what they want to do.

[Michelle Harven:](#) For me as someone not with a military background, I wanted to sort of use my civilian eyes to ask the questions that may not be obvious to a broader audience, and also help bridge that divide between civilians and service members.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I like that. I think that's important.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Yeah. I think often these communities are quite distant, and I'd like to build an understanding.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Building understanding sometimes can be difficult, like getting through a stigma. That's something you said you wanted to talk about when we're discussing the private military contracting topic.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Yeah. I think, for me like some others, I didn't know much about private military contracting. Because of that, I sort of fell into that stigma. After working on this research for this podcast, my thoughts toward the topic are far more complicated. I think that has a lot to do with the fact that this is a complicated topic. Many people, people who we will be talking with throughout the podcast, have spent years and even decades thinking about the military's use of contracting and what that means for the future.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Let's get right into our first episode. Focus on those misconceptions, get rid of these gut reactions, and let's complicate the topic a bit more for everyone else.

[Michelle Harven:](#) A prolific figure we wanted to bring to you for the first episode is someone deeply entrenched in the conversation around contracting today. He's not afraid to speak his mind. Also, he refers to himself as a former mercenary.

[Desmon Farris:](#) We sat down with the incomparable, Sean McFate.

[Sean McFate:](#) Like many in this industry, I started someplace. There's no basic training for military contractors or mercenaries. I started in the US Army. I was a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division for many years. I got out, and I went, someone said, to the dark side. I've been accused of being morally promiscuous, and worked for a private military company called DynCorp International, that does a lot of work in Africa, was of the men in Africa. We did work that the CIA or Special Forces used to do but doesn't want to do anymore or can't do anymore for all sorts of strange and disturbing reasons. I did that for several years, got out and I did other work. Then I looked around and realized that there was nobody old in my business.

[Sean McFate:](#) I ended up going back to graduate school, back to Harvard and some other places, and then finished my Ph.D. Now, I'm a professor of war essentially at the National Defense University and also at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service where I teach strategy, grand strategy or the art of war.

[Michelle Harven:](#) I feel like I wanted to start with you because I sort of started with your sort of research into the topic. It's kind of what led me into the topic a little bit.

[Desmon Farris:](#) We went digging for books.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Yes. I feel like you are sort of my introduction into it, and so I kind of wanted the listeners to be introduced the topics.

[Sean McFate:](#) Thank you.

[Desmon Farris:](#) One of the first questions people are always asking about private contracting is isn't being mercenary illegal?

[Sean McFate:](#) I give talks around the world now about this growing industry, and people generally don't have any idea how big the industry is and how it's proliferated, and what this means for world order. One of the questions I usually get, actually, it's not even a question, it's more of a statement, it's illegal, right?

[Desmon Farris:](#) Right.

[Sean McFate:](#) Here's my answer is that who cares? I'm not saying because I'm cynical about it but international public law is mostly norms between countries and breakable treaties, right?

[Desmon Farris:](#) Right.

[Sean McFate:](#) It's not really law. There's no judiciary. There's no law enforcement. There's no Geneva Convention for civilian actors. Even today, international law is pretty impotent to go after mercenaries. Anyway, who's going to go into Yemen and arrest all those mercenaries? The mercenaries will shoot your law enforcement dead. You cannot regulate this industry.

[Desmon Farris:](#) You're not getting to them.

[Sean McFate:](#) No. When you modify conflict, it is the one industry that cannot be regulated because they can kill law enforcement. Those who want to take on sort of a regulatory approach to this growing industry, it's too late. That time was when it was embryonic in the 1990s and early 2000s in Iraq. We missed that window. The Pandora's box is now open. Mercenaries which were a facet of war forever are now back in international relations, and they will only grow stronger.

[Michelle Harven:](#) I think there were a lot of people who were looking at the industry when it was growing, looking at the White House and people in power, and saying, "What is going to happen? How are they going to respond?" Then when it was silenced, they realized this is going to blow up, like this is going to be a huge issue for the future.

[Sean McFate:](#) Sorry about this. A long time ago, I was a graduate student in Harvard. My advisor was Ash Carter, who later on became Secretary of Defense. This was 2004 after the Fallujah Four when some Blackwater guys were found strung up and burned to death in Fallujah. I asked Ash Carter, "What do you think the future of the industry is? America is hiring all these >>> looks like mercenaries to me. What happens when we stop using them? Are they going to go find other clients? Aren't we unleashing the dogs of war?" He looked at me and said, "No, not really. They're going to go home when we're done." His idea which I think is emblematic across the policymakers' spectrum left and right is that these are not mercenaries. They are cheap army reservists who will go home like after World War II. That misses the whole point that these are not reservists. These are market actors. They're going to seek new clients, new means of profit and that's exactly what has happened.

[Sean McFate:](#) After we got done with them in Iraq and Afghanistan, poof, they're working for Russia. They're working for Nigeria. They're working in the Gulf. They're everywhere, and nobody has any idea where they are, how to control them, much less regulate them.

[Michelle Harven:](#) That's what also makes it difficult is that this is a global industry. It's cross nations. To sort of get a handle on that, you would need to have a global sort of agreement.

[Sean McFate:](#) Right. I mean, I think world peace will be easier.

[Michelle Harven:](#) This sort of kind of goes into the popular perception of contractors. You had this great quote, "People view soldiers like wives and mercenaries like prostitutes, as people who turn love into a transaction." I loved that because I feel like it definitely sort of encapsulates what people feel, like what's their gut reaction when they think of contractors.

[Sean McFate:](#) We view contractors differently than has been done in the past. To us, troops are saints and mercenaries are sinners. But it's a strange history of this because this was not always the case. Mercenaries are the second oldest profession in the world. For most of that history, they've been seen as an honorable yet bloody trade. The Bible mentions mercenaries several times, and never with any sort of judgment. Mercenaries helped Rome build an empire. Popes used to hire mercenaries armies in the Middle Ages This is how wars were fought. Back in the Middle Ages in the Early Renaissance, they were called [foreign language 00:13:19] which means contractor just like we call them today.

[Sean McFate:](#) Mercenaries had been around forever, and have always been a facet, sometimes the main facet, of warfare. This all started to change in the 1850s when states really invested their own standing armies and monopolized force. We are taught, growing up in sixth grade or so, that states rule the world and they have national armies and that mercenaries, which were outlawed, are all villainous. That's not true. That's not always the way it's been. We've been taught this but the actual fact is it's actually a recent innovation of warfare that only national armies go to war. So we treat mercenaries as villains, and we see this in Hollywood. We see this in the Pentagon. We see this on TV pundits. It is all wrong. It is all wrong. Mercenaries have been around for a long time.

[Sean McFate:](#) When we see now things like Nisour Square, for example ... everybody remembers when Blackwater killed 17 innocent Iraqis at traffic circle in Nisour Square in 2007 in Baghdad. It caused a huge uproar across the Middle East on the eve of the America's hearts and minds campaign. It caused a huge firestorm politically back in Washington, DC where there were multiple investigations into Blackwater and Erik Prince. This is now one of the low points of the war in Iraq.

[Sean McFate:](#) Who remembers Haditha? 2005, a squad of marines went house to house massacring 23, not 17, Iraqi civilians. Some of which were children, some of

them were in pajamas, some of them were in a wheelchair. They were not combatants. This is not a fog of war incident like Nisour Square. This was a Mỹ Lai incident like Vietnam. What happened? Does anybody know about it? No, it was swept under the rug by the Department of Defense.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I remember. We got some extra training during that time about use of force and all that stuff.

[Sean McFate:](#) It's amazing the hypocrisy of our reaction that, in some ways, if troops do it, it's considered one of the ugly factors of war but, if contractors do it, they're war criminals.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Are contractors then more like scapegoats or are they just not protected by a large enough organization that's willing to protect them?

[Sean McFate:](#) In some ways, they're scapegoats because, after the Vietnam War, the American people thought we treated troops badly. It really wasn't their fault that they were sent to Vietnam. That was policymakers, and we spit on them when they're coming home from airports. That was bad. This time around in the Iraq War, Americans embrace their military, which is great, which is great. But if you wanted to criticize the war and not criticize troops, you went after contractors. The reason why that's acceptable is because of this stigma we attached to mercenaries and contractors at them always being evil, always being the Bond villain, all those things.

[Desmon Farris:](#) I saw when we were talking about them being villainized as they kind of had a smile. How do you see them?

[Sean McFate:](#) Well, contractors are like anybody else. There are good contractors and there's bad troops. You ask your listeners, would you rather be taken prisoner by Blackwater or the army of Zimbabwe? Why do we always assume that contractors are villainous? There are good contractors, and there are bad ones. This idea that all contractors are categorically bad and all troops are categorically good, it's pretty simplistic.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Well, I mean that can be the reason because it's portrayed in movies and mainstream media as the mercenary guys over there, cutting ears off and doing all kind of crazy stuff versus saving lives.

[Sean McFate:](#) They can do good things too. Contractors are not moral agents. I mean, yes, so when I was in industry, I did meet guys who left Special Forces because they wanted to get a chain of years around their neck. They were twisted people but, to villainize the entire industry based on what Hollywood stereotypes, it's just not realistic.

[Desmon Farris:](#) You can go to say that about military too. All walks of life and people in the military, you got good and bad.

[Sean McFate:](#) We think of modern soldiers today as sort of knights. They don't work, they serve them. They do it for honor. They don't do it for money. We give them special accolades. We say, "Thank you for your service," in airports. There's a social contract between our soldiers and our people. Mercenaries check this all, turn it to a transaction, and this is an offense to knights of old and offensive to troops.

[Sean McFate:](#) If you go to a place like Erbil in Kurdistan or if you go to the capital of Uganda, those are now hubs for mercenaries looking for work. It's sort of like that bar in Star Wars in Tatooine. That's what it's like. A lot of them are former American vets who fought in Iraq, came back to civilian life, had a hard time adjusting and said, "You know, I want to go back," and they ended up ... they're now working with the Peshmerga or whomever trying to hunt and kill ISIS.

[Desmon Farris:](#) You come back and it's like that's all you know, it's what you feel. That's the new norm.

[Sean McFate:](#) Well, it is or you were a tank commander in the war and now you're delivering UPS packages and you're like, "This is not what I was ready to do." It's not new. This is an ancient phenomenon.

[Michelle Harven:](#) What are the benefits? Why do governments do that?

[Sean McFate:](#) There's a lot of reasons why governments ... and not just government, everybody is using more and more military contractors. There's good reasons and there's questionable reasons, and there are bad reasons. The good reasons is that they're cheaper. Despite what anybody says renting is cheaper than owning. It's like renting a car versus owning a car. Now in peace, they're even much cheaper because you just end the contract whereas that infantry battalions get to go home to Fort Bragg and you're paying them during peacetime, which is very expensive.

[Sean McFate:](#) Another reason why people use contractors is because they bring innovative solutions to it. Those who listen to this who were vets will know that the military has its way of doing things. Now, you get private sector innovation. When I was in this industry, and I was an industry for many years, I can reach out to people from other militaries like South Africa or people who have experienced things in the United Nations and bring best practices into our operations.

[Sean McFate:](#) Another reason we use them is they offer niche services. This is not an issue for United States of America but, if you're Nigeria and you have a terrorist problem called Boko Haram, and you need to eradicate them, and your military is just not doing it, you might hire mercenaries who have Mi-24 Hind attack helicopters. These are former Soviet flying tanks. This is a niche capability that the Nigerian military does not have. You can rent these flying mercenaries for a month. You can do all sorts of untold damage.



[Desmon Farris:](#) These are the same helicopters in Rambo type of helicopter.

[Sean McFate:](#) Yes. This is like Rambo. This is much bigger than the Apache helicopter. These are flying tanks.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Wow.

[Sean McFate:](#) The mercenaries, historically and now, offer all sorts of benefits to employers, but they also offer risks too.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Can you go into that?

[Sean McFate:](#) Sure. Well, there's some other gray area reasons why people like to hire mercenaries. One is we live in an information age, and mercenaries offer great plausible deniability. Plausible deniability today is more powerful than firepower. Mercenaries conduct what we call zero footprint operations. If you want something done in war and don't want to be caught doing it, hire mercenaries to do it instead of your own troops because, if your troops get caught doing something, say, accidentally massacring a village and somebody captures that in their iPhone and ends up on the Internet, instantly, then you have big problems. Mercenaries offer great plausible deniability.

[Sean McFate:](#) Contracting is probably our best bipartisan foreign policy thing we got going on because, Donald Rumsfeld, the then Secretary of Defense, promised the American people that these would be quick and easy wars that would pay for themselves. Rumsfeld, I think, said in 2002 that the war in Iraq would last days, weeks at the most; months, he said, were like ... it was preposterous. And here we are still entangled in both wars. These are quagmires.

[Sean McFate:](#) What policymakers back in 2004 discovered is that they had three ugly choices. They could either leave Iraq and Afghanistan prematurely and seed victory to the terrorists, they could surge and have a Vietnam-like draft to fill all the billets which would be political suicide or they can rely increasingly on contractors which is what they did because nobody cares about dead contractors. They care about dead marines, dead soldiers. Nobody cares about dead contractors. That's how we got into the situation today. Contractors are a politically expedient way to circumvent civilian control of the military.

[Michelle Harven:](#) I thought it was really interesting that you have Republican and Democratic presidents who ... they all have the same problem and they all have the same sort of solution. It is one of those issues where it doesn't matter what party you're from.

[Sean McFate:](#) This is how we fight war. I'm sometimes asked in foreign audiences, is this the new American way of war? Again, in World War II, only 10% of our force is contracted. In Vietnam, it was a quarter. In Iraq, it was 50%. In Afghanistan, it's

70%. Some people are thinking, "Wow, is the future will be 80%, 90%? Is this the new American way of war?" and the answer is yes, it is.

[Michelle Harven:](#)

Your current book New Rules of War has rule 6 which says mercenaries will return. Can you go into that?

[Sean McFate:](#)

I can. The New Rules of War, it lists out 10 new rules of how warfare is changing and what we need to change with it to win because, frankly, we've stopped winning wars since 1945. Nobody wants to talk about that. It's not just us. It's the entire West, and that's pretty scary if you think about the implications.

[Sean McFate:](#)

One of the rules is that mercenaries are returning and that changes warfare in ways that our current four stars have no idea about what's to hit them, and that puts us all at risk. For example, when you commodify conflict, suddenly, the strategies of Wall Street apply to warfare. This is areas where CEOs may know more than generals. We are not prepared to fight a war where it's a for-profit war model but works in traditional war will backfire in private warfare. We're getting to an era now where this will change international relations as we know of because, if the superrich can buy firepower, then the superrich can become superpowers.

[Sean McFate:](#)

Oil companies will have private armies. Random billionaires will. Oligarchs already do. What we will see are wars without states in the future. They will not play by the war rules that we teach in war colleges today. We are willfully unprepared for this type of warfare.

[Desmon Farris:](#)

Now that your head may be spinning, let's back up a little bit and give some fundamental information about what we mean when we say private military security contractor. For that, we turn to David Isenberg, a US Navy veteran, an independent researcher and writer on US military foreign policy, and has researched the subject of private military and security contracting since the early '90s, and is the author of Shadow Force: Private Security Contractors in Iraq.

[Michelle Harven:](#)

We started the conversation talking about Executive Outcomes, sort of a grandfather of private military companies, and an important part of the industry's history.

[David Isenberg:](#)

The Executive Outcomes was the first modern private security company to undertake combat operations and successfully. They fought on behalf of the Angolan government against Jonas Savimbi, and then they went on to Sierra Leone. They fought the murderous RUF, the Revolutionary United Front, which was on the verge of causing the rather delicate Sierra Leone government to collapse. This was a notoriously violent group. I mean their trademark atrocity was capturing someone and say, "What do you want off? Shall we cut off your arm or shall we cut off your leg?" and they beat those people back when they were in the verge of overrunning Freetown and they did it exactly under the

terms of their contract. I think it was not operating at the behest of the South African government. It was entirely independent. They chose its customers carefully and wisely, and did so in expectation of doing something entirely in the public interest as well as their own private interest to make money. So Executive Outcomes remains the mother of all private security contractors. They were, as the British say, a one-off company engaging in combat. They did so successfully and honorably, and nobody has done the same since.

[Michelle Harven:](#) So this caught your eye?

[David Isenberg:](#) Oh, absolutely. I think for the most part, since then, I wouldn't say most companies have lived up to that kind of legacy that EO displayed.

[Desmon Farris:](#) A basic question that turns out to be surprisingly complicated is what does it mean when we talk about private military or a security contractor?

[David Isenberg:](#) Private military companies generally refer to the large companies who are doing logistics work like KBR. They're getting supplies various kinds from point A to point B. They are providing all the services you need at a given base to make it function. They're not weapons carriers. They're not combatants. They're not shooters. The other main category, of course, are your private security contractors. Now, these are the people who are actually carrying guns. These are people who are hired as part of protective security details. They were escorting a high ranking official, could be a general, could be more likely a State Department employee from point A to point B to get them safely. If they come under attack, they're authorized to return fire, use as much force as they need but they're not there to stage a longstanding firefight.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Can you put those in a simple term to separate a mercenary and a contractor?

[David Isenberg:](#) I would say, traditionally, a mercenary somebody who is inherently a warfighter. They're carrying weapons or using them in conflict and in combat. As I as we noted earlier, the private contractor in military operations may never carry a weapon. There are lots of people doing noncombat functions as contractors, but they're not mercenaries. They are not directly involved in combat.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Now, technically, under the Geneva Conventions, to be a mercenary, you must meet six pretty stringent conditions. It's meant to be restrictive because it's a legal definition. But the term mercenary is used mostly to describe a contractor who's being paid to actively fight and battle. There aren't many of them today. Now, to get another stereotype out of the way, whenever the media portrays a military contractor in a movie or show, you're usually seeing a former tier 1 operator, which are the best of the best of the military Special Forces. This is fundamentally not true in these contractor roles. In actuality, many of these roles are filled by third country nationals, meaning they're hired to work outside of their home country.

[David Isenberg:](#) Pakistan, Nepal, there's also a lot of people. We've have been hired from Northern African countries hired by, say, countries in the Middle East. United Arab Emirates has been known for hiring people from African countries as part of their fighting the war in Yemen, usually impoverished, oftentimes employed at very low wages, sometimes employed in deplorable conditions and taken advantage of, but we're not all tier 1 people. For one thing, they have to pay them more because they have a lot more experience. You wouldn't hire a tier 1 contractor if all you want to do is manage checkpoint outside the base to inspect vehicles or car bombs, for example. That would be a waste of money from the company's point of view, at least.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Just to visualize it, are contractors like an army where they're standing all next to each other people from all over the globe or are they sort of stationed individually in roles where a contractor would work but they're working with a more standard military troop?

[David Isenberg:](#) It's actually a little part from both. First off, contractors are very definitely not an army. Having been in the military, I can tell you that contractors, even if you confine it just to private security contractors, do not have the same table of organization and equipment that a regular military force does. For the most part, they wouldn't have the same sort of unit cohesiveness that a regular military unit would have, which is not to say they don't develop a sort of cohesiveness on their own. The regular military forces have been doing this for hundreds of years since the rise of nations. To make a regular military force what it is takes time, effort and money though they're not attributes that a private profit-seeking company, for the most part, is willing to spend.

[Michelle Harven:](#) We talked about issues within the industry like hiring impoverished workers, but there are benefits as well. Otherwise, you wouldn't think we'd be using them. One of the main arguments for using contractors is that they are cost effective.

[David Isenberg:](#) Well, it's like the question of beauty. Beauty is in the eye of beholder until its cost effectiveness. If you're a civilian being guarded by a protective security detail and they get you safely from point A to point B, you're not really even thinking about cost. You're just thinking they're effective because "they kept me alive. Thank God for you." So they are doing their job.

[David Isenberg:](#) Blackwater, back in the day, guarding Paul Bremer notes that they never lost a client. They may have lost their own personnel, but they didn't lose a client. That was no small thing given the conditions back then.

[David Isenberg:](#) I'd simply say that argument is far from being definitively answered as to who is more cost effective. Really, it comes down to what do you consider to be a benefit and what do you consider to be a cost, and people count those in different ways. When that day comes, when everybody has agreed what is a cost and benefit, then maybe we'll have an answer. Hasn't happened yet; I look forward to the day when it does. I don't expect to be alive though.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Why do you think it's important for people to care about private military contracting?

[David Isenberg:](#) The analogy I like to use stems from science fiction, actually. If people remember the original Alien movie, they remember the alien parasite when it first infects the human and grows inside of it. That's what contractors have done. They have metastasized, and they have become so intertwined with the guts of the US Department of Defense and American military operations that you simply can't go to war without them. If you tried, everything would come crashing to a halt. They transport the fuel. They transport the oil, the lubricant, the ammo, the uniforms. They provide laundry services. They provide canteen services. They do security around the bases. You can't deploy without that. If you don't have them, you don't do anything.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Thanks to David Isenberg for taking the time to talk with us. He has one of the few, if not the only, blogs solely dedicated to private military and security contracting. Check that out at Isenberg Institute of Strategic Satire.

[Desmon Farris:](#) Thanks to Sean McFate for sharing his passion and insight into the PMC world. Be sure to look for his book, The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder.

[Desmon Farris:](#) In our next episode, we'll hear from Adam Gonzalez, a former Blackwater contractor. He talks about his time protecting the US Ambassador Paul Bremer and much, much more.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Don't miss it.

[Desmon Farris:](#) We have a lot more planned. We'll get into maritime contractors and, yes, talk about pirates.

[Michelle Harven:](#) Cool, and discuss some of the biggest issues today like issues of healthcare and mental wellness for contractors overseas, outsourcing intelligence, cyber security, and what the future holds.

[Desmon Farris:](#) So be sure to subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. We'll be dropping episodes the first three Thursdays of each month. We hope you join us.

[Voiceover:](#) This is Force for Hire.